

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, designed for Gaelic learners who already have some knowledge of the language. A short vocabulary and comments on points of grammar and figures of speech are included with the text. If you have comments, Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.macleon@bbc.co.uk. This is Litir 473. Note that there is also a simplified version called An Litir Bheag which is likewise available on the BBC website. Litir Bheag 169 corresponds to Litir 473.

Nuair a tha mi ann an Nirribhidh gach bliadhna, a’ sgitheadh, bidh mi gu tric a’ dol seachad air àiteachan le ainmean a tha a’ cur nam chuimhne ainmean-àite ann an Alba. Am-bliadhna chaidh mi gu *Grønebakken*. Tha fhios gu bheil sin a’ ciallachadh “bruthach ghorm” no “bruthach ghlas” – oir chì sinn *bakken* ann an àiteachan mar “Am Bac” ann an Leòdhas. Agus faisg air Calanais ann an Leòdhas tha Beinn Ghrèineabhal. Thàinig Grèineabhal bhon Lochlannais *Grønefjall*, a’ ciallachadh “beinn ghorm”.

Tha e spòrsail a bhith a’ toirt sùil air na tha anns a’ chumantas eadar na h-ainmean-àite anns na dùthchannan Lochlannach agus a’ Ghàidhealtachd againne. Agus as t-samhradh bha mi ann an nàdar de dhùthaich Lochlannach, ged a tha e mar phàirt de dh’Alba. Bha mi ann an Arcaibh – far a bheil na h-ainmean-àite cha mhòr gu lèir a’ tighinn bho sheann chànanan nan Lochlannach.

Chuir mi seachad dà latha ann an Stromness agus abair gu bheil am baile beag sin brèagha. Mo bheannachd aig an luchd-dealbhadh air Comhairle Arcaibh a rinn cinnteach nach biodh an seann bhaile air a sgrios le togalaichean grànda ùra. Is bochd nach robh iad an sàs anns an dearbh ghnòthach anns a’ bhaile agam fhìn – Inbhir Nis. Ach fàgaidh mi an gearan sin do latha eile!

Tha e furasta gu leòr obrachadh a-mach dè tha an t-ainm Stromness a’ ciallachadh. Tha *strom* a’ ciallachadh “sruth-mara” agus tha *ness* a’ ciallachadh “rubha”. Chithear an dà rud sin ann an grunn àiteachan ann an Alba. Faisg air a’ bhaile, tha sruth mara eagallach anns a’ chaolas eadar Tìr-mòr Arcaibh agus na h-eileanan gu deas oirre. Agus tha mi a’ ciallachadh “eagallach” oir bha sinn a’ deisealachadh gus dhol gu muir ann an gheat. Dh’fheumamaid feitheamh gus am biodh an sruth leinn airson Stromness fhàgail. Bhiodh e fìor dhoirbh dhol na aghaidh.

Gu deas air Stromness tha eilean mòr àrd air a bheil Hòdhaigh. Tha an t-ainm a’ ciallachadh “eilean àrd”. Fhad ’s a bha sinn a’ dol seachad air an eilean anns a’ bhàt’-aiseig, **thàinig e a-steach orm** gun robh e rudeigin eadar-dhealaichte bhon chòrr de dh’Arcaibh. Chithear mòinteach ann, is talamh garbh agus fraoch – rudan nach eil cumanta ann an eileanan eile ann an Arcaibh. Tha iadsan uabhasach torrach, feurach. “Nam biodh na Gàidheil riamh ann an àite sam bith an Arcaibh, seo far am bitheadh iad,” shaoil mi rium fhìn.

Agus, nuair a fhuair mi grèim air cairt-dùthcha dhen eilean, bha ainm no dhà ann a bha a’ coimhead rudeigin Gàidhealach, ’s dòcha. Laigh mo shùil air ainm a th’ air a litreachadh c-l-i-c-k-n-a-f-e-a. “Rudeigin na fèith” ’s dòcha – *of the bog channel?* Uill, leis gun robh an t-sìde nar n-aghaidh airson seòladh, bha ùine agam dhol don leabharlann ann an Kirkwall,

prìomh bhaile Arcaibh. “Ciamar a chanar an t-ainm-àite seo?” dh’fhaighnich mi dhen leabharlannaiche. “Chan eil fhios agam,” fhreagair ise. “S ann à Sligeach an Èirinn a tha mise!”

Gu fortanach bha tèile ag obair ann a bhuineadh do dh’Arcaibh, agus thug ise dhomh fuaimneachadh an ainm – Click-na-FIA. Agus fhuair mi a-mach gur e *fea* a chanas iad an-diugh ann an Arcaibh ris an eileamaid a thàinig bhon t-seann Lochlannais *ffjall*, a’ ciallachadh “cnoc”. Tha e cumanta gu leòr agus, gu dearbh, chan eil e Gàidhealach idir.

Ach tha cuid, a th’ air sùil a thoirt air ainmean-àite Arcaibh dhen bheachd gur dòcha gur ann à cànan Ceilteach – Gàidhlig no Cruithnis – a thàinig cuid dhiubh. Bheir sinn sùil air feadhainn an ath-sheachdain.

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Faclan na Litreach: spòrsail: *good fun*; Arcaibh: *Orkney*; gearan: *complaint*; sruth-mara: *marine current*; eagallach: *frightening*; Hòdhaigh: *Hoy*; torrach, feurach: *fertile and grassy*; leabharlannaiche: *librarian*; Cruithnis: *Pictish language*.

Abairtean na Litreach: a tha a’ cur nam chuimhne: *which remind me [of]*; bruthach ghorm/ghlas: *green slope, bank*; na tha anns a’ chumantas eadar: *what is in common between*; nàdar de dhùthaich Lochlannach: *a sort of Scandinavian land*; abair gu bheil am baile beag sin brèagha: *what a beautiful little town that is*; mo bheannachd aig an luchd-dealbhachaidh air Comhairle Arcaibh: *my congratulations to the planners on Orkney Islands Council*; nach biodh an seann bhaile air a sgrios le togalaichean grànda ùra: *that the old town wouldn’t be destroyed by ugly new buildings*; is bochd nach robh iad an sàs anns an dearbh ghnothach: *it’s a pity they weren’t involved in the same matter*; Tìr-mòr Arcaibh agus na h-eileanan gu deas oirre: *Orkney Mainland and the islands south of it*; bha sinn a’ deisealachadh gus dhol gu muir ann an gheat: *we were preparing to go sea in a yacht*; dh’fheumamaid feitheamh gus am biodh an sruth leinn: *we would have to wait until the [tidal] flow was with us*; chithear mòinteach ann, is talamh garbh agus fraoch: *moorland can be seen there, along with rough country and heather*; laigh mo shùil air: *my eye fell on*; leis gun robh an t-side nar n-aghaidh: *as the weather was against us*; ciamar a chanar an t-ainm-àite seo?: *how is this place-name said?*; ’s ann à Sligeach an Èirinn a tha mise: *it’s from Sligo in Ireland that I am*; bha tèile ag obair ann a bhuineadh do dh’Arcaibh: *there was another lady working there who belonged to Orkney*; fuaimneachadh an ainm: *the pronunciation of the name*.

Puing-chànain na Litreach: *I can hardly wait for the proposed historical dictionary of Scottish Gaelic to appear – although it will be at least thirty years. Another good reason to keep my cholesterol level down so that I live to see it! I’d love to find out, for example, why we adopted Graonlainn (or A’ Ghraonlainn) as our name for Greenland – after the Norse Grønland (without grøen becoming grèin as it did in several Gaelicized place names), whereas we adopted the name of a mythical island, Innis Tìle (“the Island of Thule”) for Iceland. This island is shown (erroneously) on an old Scandinavian map on display in Kirkwall Museum. The Irish have the same name as we do for Greenland, but they adopted the Scandinavian name for Iceland and call it An Íoslainn. Can anyone offer me an explanation?*

Gnathas-cainnt na Litreach: thàinig e a-steach orm gun robh e rudeigin eadar-dhealaichte bhon chòrr de dh’Arcaibh: *it occurred to me that it was a bit different from the rest of Orkney*.

** Tha “Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh” air a maoinachadh le Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig*